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COORDINATION QUESTIONS: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE SPECIAL INITIATIVE ON AFRICA

Report of the Secretary-General

Progress report on the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa

SUMMARY

The present progress report has been prepared in response to a request of the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-sixth session. It contains the conclusions reached by the Administrative Committee on Coordination Steering Committee at its fifth and sixth meetings and reflects reports presented by specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system to the two meetings.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. At its thirty-sixth session, in 1996, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC), while welcoming the potential of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa as an operational arm of and a complement to the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s focusing on a limited number of priority issues facing Africa, expressed strong concern about the prevailing trend to flood Africa with new initiatives that were hardly implemented. Noting that the organizations of the United Nations system, including, in particular, the World Bank, had committed themselves to working together, the Committee urged them to produce tangible results and requested that a report on the implementation of the Special Initiative be submitted at its spring session in 1997 and thereafter, as it may decide.[1]

2. The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa was launched in March 1996 by members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) to enhance United Nations support for African development by strengthening coordination and creating synergy within the system. It was to identify and develop practical proposals to maximize the support provided by the United Nations system to African development and is focused on five priority areas: water, food security, governance, social and human development, and resource mobilization. In addition, it contains two cross cutting themes: gender and population and capacity-building.

3. At the fifth meeting of the ACC Steering Committee, held on 20 September 1996, it was decided to change the designation of lead agency(ies) to coordinating agency(ies) and it was also decided that the agencies should organize their methods of collaboration and division of labour. The coordinating agencies are the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank.

4. The Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly, which conducted the mid-term review of the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, resolved that the System-wide Special Initiative was complementary to the New Agenda and was designed to facilitate its implementation and the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences, as they related to Africa. While welcoming this new Special Initiative, the Ad Hoc Committee advised that the United Nations system should focus its efforts on coordination and implementation of the New Agenda and avoid unnecessary duplication of activities.[2] Subsequently, after consideration of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee, the General Assembly, in its resolution 51/32, adopted on 6 December 1996, recognized the complementary role of the Special Initiative in the implementation of the New Agenda, including the mobilization of adequate resources. A similar view was expressed during the 1996 meeting of the ACC. As a follow-up, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development prepared, with the secretariat of the Special Initiative at the Regional Bureau for Africa of UNDP, a matrix, which linked the priority areas of the New Agenda and of the Special Initiative

to the corresponding recommendations of the mid-term review. Annexes to the matrix highlighted implementation arrangements and the role of coordinating and cooperating agencies. The matrix and the annexes provided a starting point for the further monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the New Agenda.

5. After extensive discussion, the sixth meeting of the ACC Steering Committee, held on 7 April 1997, took note of progress achieved and the potential for greater improvements in the Special Initiative and also the difference in scope between the New Agenda and the Special Initiative. The meeting recognized that the New Agenda represented the overall political framework meant to galvanize international support for Africa, while the Special Initiative was an implementation mechanism that could bring about significant added value in terms of mobilizing system-wide synergies, engendering national ownership and commitment and forming a stronger basis for resource mobilization, thus contributing to the successful implementation of the New Agenda.

6. The fifth and sixth meetings of the ACC Steering Committee received written reports from several United Nations programmes and specialized agencies, among them the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, UNDP, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), FAO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), UNESCO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), WHO, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Meteorological Organization and the World Bank, as well as reports from some resident coordinators. Some of these reports were subsequently updated, taking into account activities that have been implemented after the sixth Steering Committee meeting.

II. ACTIVITIES IN THE PRIORITY AREAS

1. Water

7. The reports on water resources were presented by UNEP and the World Bank, the two coordinating agencies for the priority area. The components of the priority area being dealt with in the water working group comprise equitable access to and sustainable use of water resources; improved household water security; expanded freshwater assessments; and ensuring water for food production. The Group includes representatives from 10 agencies and offices (UNDP, WHO, UNICEF, FAO, WMO, the Department for Development Support and Management Services, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (UNCHS-Habitat), ECA, IAEA and the United Nations University (UNU). The reports provided information on a number of related activities and stated that the collaborating United Nations agencies shared the following common goals:

(a) To build consensus on a coordinated agenda for implementation of the water components of the Special Initiative;

(b) To define and agree on the specific roles and functions of lead and cooperating agencies and;

(c) To continue to refine the implementation activities in support of the water components of the Special Initiative.

8. According to the reports of the World Bank and UNEP to the sixth meeting of the ACC Steering Committee, the water working group would continue as the primary coordinating body for implementation of the water components of the Special Initiative and UNEP and the World Bank would continue to serve as co-chairs of the working group. Related activities would be carried out at regional and national levels and would incorporate non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the academic community. At its second meeting in October 1996, the working group agreed on certain selection criteria and identified four countries for concerted inter-agency action in support of the Special Initiative. The countries selected are Mali, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda. The countries would supply United Nations agencies with results so as to refine their mechanisms to assist Governments in the most effective manner and to provide a better rationale for donor agencies to fund the implementation of the water objectives of the Special Initiative.

9. The working group also favoured initiating a dialogue in the four selected countries between representatives of UNEP, UNDP and ECA. The group accordingly informed the resident coordinators in the four countries to facilitate such dialogue with the Governments and among the representatives of United Nations programmes and organizations and recommended that the Steering Committee of the Special Initiative monitor the initiative. The group recognized the importance of convening an African "advisory group" to participate in the implementation of the objectives and suggested a list of possible criteria for measuring success in implementing the water objectives. The water working group also felt that greater efforts were necessary to foster inter-working group consultations and collaborations. The World Bank stated that its progress at country level towards implementing the Africa region's water strategy involved three interrelated partnerships with several United Nations agencies: (a) water resources management policy reforms; (b) community water supply and sanitation; and (c) small-scale irrigation.

2. Food security

10. FAO, as the coordinating agency in the food security cluster of activities within the Special Initiative, reported that related activities concentrated on soil quality improvement; food security with special emphasis on women; land degradation and desertification control; and water for food production, the last in conjunction with UNEP and the World Bank. FAO indicated that it had attempted to decentralize, as far as possible, the implementation of this cluster and that the identification of activities, the mobilization of resources for their funding and effective coordination must be carried out at country level. FAO's report to the sixth meeting of the ACC Steering Committee contained an overview of activities on the four above-mentioned topics.

11. The report provided gave specific country examples in soil quality improvement and desertification (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Togo and Uganda). It also contained reports on projects to support income-generating activities by women and of reform of land tenure systems to

favour women and other programmes with gender components on nutrition (Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Lesotho, Malawi, Togo, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Some countries recognized the relevance of gender in agricultural development by the creation of ministries for women's affairs (Namibia) or units for women and development issues for sector ministries (Nigeria). Activities in a number of countries were listed in connection with the theme of water for food production.

12. As part of the follow-up to the World Food Summit, FAO also mentioned a recently held dialogue between the permanent representatives to FAO in Rome, United Nations agencies and some development banks. In addition, a technical consultation on the food insecurity and vulnerability information mapping system was held with all interested partner agencies in Rome in March 1997. FAO referred also to its Special Programme on Food Production for Food Security (SPFP), stating that its pilot phase of about three years' duration with its interrelated components contained several elements in common with the Special Initiative.

13. UNIDO reported on the launching of the Alliance for Africa's Industrialization in October 1996, which was conceived as a means of accelerating the industrialization process in Africa in consultation with the Bureau of the Conference of African Ministers of Industry, the secretariats of ECA and OAU, African policy makers and private sector groups. It pointed out that the initial focus would be on linking industry and agriculture as a factor for improved food security in Africa. UNIDO has already allocated $490,000 for initial needs assessment and preparatory assistance in selected countries under the following four central themes: capacity-building; linking industry and agriculture; promoting growth of small- and medium-sized enterprises; and promoting private sector investment.

14. UNDP as coordinating agency, with FAO, IFAD, UNEP and WFP as cooperating agencies, reported to the sixth meeting of the Steering Committee on an inter-agency meeting on sustainable livelihoods in environmentally marginal areas, held in January 1997. At this meeting, the collaborating agencies raised concerns regarding possible duplication between the thematic area under the Special Initiative and ongoing activities for the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. Potential overlap would exist with the priority areas under the Special Initiative on "land degradation and desertification control", "water for food security" and "poverty reduction through the promotion of the informal sector and employment generating opportunities".

15. The agencies recommended that, within the spirit of the country driven, action- and result-oriented approach of the Special Initiative, a few selected countries should be approached for initiating work on this priority area, building on already ongoing activities. It was decided that the core group of collaborating agencies would play only a catalytic role in order to facilitate the initiation of the process at country level within the context of existing coordination mechanisms for the activities of United Nations agencies. Accordingly, measures to be carried out and also on the criteria to be used for country selection, were agreed upon.

3. Governance

16. UNESCO reported on a project entitled "Communications for Peace-Building", which would address, in particular, the issues of peace-building; conflict resolution and national reconciliation; strengthening the capacity for governance; and strengthening of civil society for development. The main objective was to use communications - particularly radio broadcasting - to convey messages and programmes that could foster a culture of peace and create an environment conducive to a sustainable development. Under the project, 1 regional and 12 national plans of action for building peace in Africa through communication would be prepared. The project should contribute, through the use of the media, to the consolidation of democracy and peace in Africa. The principal beneficiaries of the project should be independent and public service media institutions, community-based media organizations and the general population in the selected countries.

17. UNESCO also reported on national culture of peace programmes already initiated in Mozambique and Burundi by re-establishing the confidence of the population in public institutions through information and education programmes involving the media. In West and Central Africa, UNESCO launched a three-year project on communication and good governance in 10 countries and in Rwanda it is seeking to strengthen the skills of media practitioners and to guarantee the operations of independent media through training and seminars.

18. As part of its broader involvement in the partnership for capacity-building in Africa initiative, the World Bank reported on providing technical support to UNDP within the area of governance. Collaborative efforts continued in the development of a pilot programme in Ethiopia, among others. The initiative is dedicated to improving capacity-building within the public and private sectors, in education and training and in civil society as well as to improving the Bank's internal incentives for providing support in these areas. UNDP, ILO and ECA pledged their support. The World Bank has also collaborated closely with United Nations agencies and other interested partners in promoting Internet connectivity activities for development.

19. The Committee noted that the governance activities planned for 1997, involving ECA, UNDP and concerned United Nations departments and cooperating agencies, require the organization of a series of consultations, including African heads of State, and NGOs, which will culminate in the African governance forum, scheduled for July 1997. The emphasis of the consultations was on building partnerships through consensus and on sharing information and experience among African Governments and their external partners, with a view to mobilizing resources.

4. Social and human development

20. With respect to poverty reduction through the promotion of the informal sector and employment generating opportunities, ILO reported on the programme of action that had been worked out jointly with ECA. These two institutions are lead agencies in the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Africa's Critical Economic Situation, Recovery and Development, whose members also include FAO,

the World Bank, UNDP, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNESCO, UNIDO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. The programme of action would concentrate on the following subprogrammes: (a) enabling environment for informal sector development; (b) access to financial services; (c) education and training; (d) industrial and manufacturing activities; (e) rural non-farm activities; and (f) infrastructure. Attempts were being made to maintain a gender focus in all the subprogrammes. In implementing the subprogramme, the participation of the private sector, NGOs and donors was stressed alongside the public sector. At the September 1996 meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force, the World Bank proposed a detailed programme of support for microfinance for poverty alleviation under the Special Initiative. Participants welcomed the collaborative approach embodied in the proposal and designated the Bank as the lead agency for the proposed action on access to financial services. The first countries suggested for focus effort were Benin, Ghana and Mozambique.

21. UNICEF indicated that it was cooperating in the implementation of several components of the Special Initiative, such as health sector reform, basic education, freshwater and household water security, food security with special emphasis on women, communication and strengthening civil society for peace building, strengthening civil society for development and substantial debt relief. Regarding sectoral programme activities, UNICEF has been contributing to the education sector through mobilizing funds, for example, from the Governments of Canada and Norway for girls' education or through working with the Association for the Development of African Education and with NGOs dealing with female education. Furthermore, UNICEF helped accelerate the implementation of water strategies within UNICEF-assisted programmes in East and Southern Africa. Regarding the activities at country level, UNICEF has also been actively promoting the intensification of ongoing country programmes.

22. WHO and the World Bank reported to the Steering Committee's fifth meeting on a successful series of meetings on health sector reform, involving African Ministers of Health and the United Nations system. They stated that implementation strategies for the health cluster have been finalized and widely circulated to African heads of State and to the international community. Performance criteria have been agreed and the programmes have been endorsed by African Ministers of Health. WHO emphasized the fact that while it was agreeable to country level resource mobilization, it would not be able to cater to countries that did not meet the World Bank's conditions, the costs of intercountry consultations requested by African Ministers of Health and the costs of undertaking greater advocacy by the regional office.

23. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has continued to participate actively in the activities in the sectors of health and education. It has been participating in policy-related meetings with other United Nations agencies, including the World Bank and WHO. UNFPA continues to collaborate with other agencies in the development of strategies for health sector reform and to support its implementation. Consultations are being held with the World Bank on basic education with special emphasis on family life education both in and out of school and the promotion of education for women and girls.

24. UNFPA has been participating in country level retreats to ensure, inter alia, the mainstreaming of population and gender concerns in all aspects of the Special Initiative. Regarding operational activities, UNFPA has been supporting Special Initiative-related priorities regarding the provision of reproductive health including family planning information and services for men, women and adolescents, the incorporation of population variables and gender concerns in short- and medium-term sectoral plans, data collection activities for advocacy, planning and programme purposes and the strengthening of national capacity in the population field.

5. Resource mobilization

25. IMF reported to the fifth meeting of the ACC Steering Committee on debt, with specific reference to the initiative for the heavily indebted poor countries. At the sixth meeting, IMF further indicated that its intensified efforts are made in supporting strong and timely adjustment, structural reform, institution building and the attainment of sustainable debt profiles of qualifying countries. IMF was supporting each country according to its own initiatives and special circumstances. The majority of the economic programmes were within the framework of three-year extended structural adjustment facility (ESAF) arrangements. The Fund explained that the emphasis on structural reform was specifically designed to remove policy and administrative impediments to economic activity and stimulate structural transformation. IMF provided detailed information on the technical assistance given to African countries in 1996 and also reported on the activities of IMF in the area of training of African professionals in economics, finance and banking.

26. The World Bank's Regional Vice-President for Africa established a high-level committee in the Africa region to support him in fulfilling the Bank's commitments in the priority areas of the Special Initiative. The Bank is committed to rapidly improving basic education and health services through strengthened collaboration between donors and other institutions, in particular, with UNESCO, ECA, UNDP and the World Health Organization African Regional Office (WHO/AFRO). Resource mobilization for health and education takes place largely at country level, within the framework of sector investment programmes (SIPs) and other sector-wide approaches agreed upon between Governments and external partners. Although there is consensus that all countries are eligible to participate, the magnitude and nature of support will depend on the readiness of countries to implement sector-wide reforms and investment programmes. Currently, nine countries have been classified to fall in that category for health and five for education.

27. ECA reported to the Steering Committee on progress in the programme for harnessing information technology for development, indicating that agreement has been reached among collaborating agencies on the various components of the cluster, on inter-agency division of labour, on policy requirements and on modalities of establishing the network, taking into account the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), which had been approved by the ECA Conference of Ministers and endorsed by the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The objective was to sensitize national stakeholders to the importance of using information and communication technology for development and

to develop national information and communications infrastructure plans. By the end of 1998, national training centres should also be ready to operate. It was agreed that ECA, UNESCO, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNDP and UNCTAD would take the lead on resource mobilization. It is planned to widely disseminate the action framework of the African Information Society Initiative throughout Africa and to partner organizations worldwide and to conduct one pilot national workshop.

28. ECA also reported on several other initiatives, all aiming at democratizing access to information and expanding it beyond the relatively wealthy urban areas to distant, disadvantaged communities. Another initiative presented by ECA to the ACC Steering Committee is a communication strategy to mobilize all the relevant actors and stakeholders under the Special Initiative for achieving results at the country level and to contribute to the new momentum for Africa's development. ECA reported also on South-South cooperation that would focus on national, interregional and intra-Africa linkages, with full utilization of information technology.

29. The Steering Committee reached agreement on the necessity to utilize a common communication strategy. Its objectives should be to help improve the image of Africa in order to mobilize support, stress on positive and concrete contributions of the Special Initiative at country level, and build support for the Initiative. The Committee members were invited to transmit their comments on the document containing the draft communication strategy to the ECA Executive Secretary. ECA was also requested to consider establishing a clearing house mechanism for a calendar of meetings in Africa.

6. Country coverage and implementation arrangements

30. The sixth meeting of the Steering Committee confirmed the all inclusiveness of the Special Initiative, endorsing the consensus, which emerged from the technical working group at ECA, held on 5-6 March 1997, on country typologies, which give guidelines for determining the scope and type of assistance to be provided to each country on the basis of the level of development of the sector concerned. Country level implementation was becoming more evident through support for policy advisory services, capacity-building and preparation of sector investment programmes (SIPs) in the priority sectors of education, health, water and governance. Resident coordinators and country teams were organizing retreats to enhance implementation. The meeting stressed the need for the Special Initiative to demonstrate added value in the pursuit of agreed system goals in the relevant sector.

31. It was agreed that assistance should be provided for all categories of countries on the basis of requirements determined in consultations with Governments, civil society, the United Nations system and the donor community. The Steering Committee came to the conclusion that implementation arrangements at different levels should take into account cross sectoral aspects. The Special Initiative should also provide necessary assistance for intercountry and cross-boundary requirements in the relevant priority areas.

32. The Steering Committee noted that progress in African ownership and leadership has been demonstrated in several key priority sectors, notably in education, health sector reform and in the greater utilization of information technology for development. It recognized that the commitment of the United Nations system to the Special Initiative was being enhanced by collaboration at cluster levels in education, health, water, governance, harnessing information technology for development, debt and sustainable livelihood in marginal areas. The meeting felt that continued collaboration and cooperation at the country level was aiming at capturing and maintaining the United Nations system synergies.

33. The Steering Committee noted that the Special Initiative was achieving progress on a number of fronts through synergies from working together and increased dialogue and intensification of efforts. However, there was a need to increase the pace of implementation of cluster priorities to cover more countries through harmonization of various programming instruments and agreement on common implementation arrangements in order to minimize transaction cost for recipient countries.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/51/16), part one, para. 158.

[2] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 48 (A/51/48), para. 95.